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ERMELINE

A BALLAD

BY

GEORGE BORROW

LONDON :

PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION

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WITH lance upraised so haughtily
Sir Thunye rides from Alsey town ;
On land and main he was, I ween,
A daring knight of high renown.

Sir Thunye rides in good green wood,
He fain will chase the nimble hare ;
And there he meeteth the Dwarf's daughter,
All with her band of maidens fair.

Sir Thunye rides in good green wood,
To chase the nimble hart and hind ;
And there he meets the Dwarf's daughter,
Beneath the linden bough reclin'd.

She rested 'neath the linden's shade,
The gold harp in her hand was seen :
"O yonder I spy Sir Thunye ride,
I'll bring him to my feet, I ween.

"Now sit ye down, my maids so small,
And sit you down my little foot boy ;
For I the Runic note will play,
Till field and meadow bloom with joy."

Then struck she amain the Runic stroke,
The harp began so sweet to ring,
The wild bird on the twig that sat
Forgot its merry song to sing.

The wild bird on the bough that sat
Forgot its merry song to sing ;
The wild hart running in the shaw
Forgot forthwith to leap and spring.

Then bloomed the mead, the bough burst forth,
As wildly rang that Runic strain ;
Sir Thunye fiercely spurred his steed,
But, ah ! to 'scape he strove in vain.

It was the knight Sir Thunye then
From his good courser bounded he ;
He went up to the Dwarf's daughter,
And took his seat beside her knee.

“ Hail to thee, Daughter of the Dwarf !
Do thou become my wedded wife,
And I'll respect and honor thee,
All, all the days I gain in life.

“ Here sitt'st thou, Daughter of the Dwarf,
A rose amongst the lilies all ;
No man can see thee in this world
But thee his own he fain would call.”

“ Now list to me, Sir Thunye the knight,
Give up, I beg, this amorous play ;
I have already a bridegroom bold,
The King whom all the dwarfs obey.

“ My father sits within the hill,
He marshals there his elfin power ;
Next Monday morn my bridegroom bold
Shall bear me to his elfin bower.

“ My mother in the hill doth sit,
And plays with gold that round is strewn ;
But I stole away from out the hill,
To play upon my harp a tune.”

“ O ere the Dwarf shall thee possess,
And his shall be a bliss so high,
O I will lose my youthful life,
And break my faulchion willingly.”

Then answered straight the Dwarf's daughter,
And with a frown thus answered she :
“ O thou may'st gain a lovelier bride,
But ne'er, Sir Knight, wilt thou gain me.

“ Now haste away, Sir Thunye the knight,
I rede thee for thy life take heed ;
My father and my bold bridegroom
I ween will both be here with speed.”

It was her mother, the Dwarf's Lady,
She peeped from out the mountain's side ;
And she was aware of Sir Thunye there,
Standing beneath the linden wide.

Out came her mother, the Dwarf's Lady,

And anger shone upon her face :

“ Now hear Wolfhilda, daughter mine,

But ill beseems thee such a place.

“ Thou'dst better sit within the hill,

And sew the linen white as snow,

Than come to strike the gold harp here,

Beneath the verdant forest bough.

“ The King of the Dwarfs has wedded thee.

Thy free consent he sought and won ;

Yet thou hast dared Sir Thunye here

To chain with stroke of magic Rune.”

It was the daughter of the Dwarf

Must weeping into the mountain flee ;

Devoid of sense Sir Thunye went

Behind her, nor could hear nor see.

But hear what did the wife of the Dwarf :

With silk so soft a stool she spread,

And there he sat till crow of cock,

As though he had been stark and dead.

But hear what did the wife of the Dwarf :

The book of power forth she brought,
Therewith she broke the Runic thrall,
Wherein the hero had been caught.

“ Now have I freed thee from the Runes,
They never more can thee oppress :
This have I done for honor’s sake,
My daughter thee shall not possess.

“ Much more, Sir Knight, for thee I’ll do,
For sheer goodwill and affection pure ;
I will for thee a bonnier bride
Than any elfin maid procure.

“ I was not born in this wild hill,
Of Christian folk I am the child ;
An only sister I possess,
And she Dame Ermeline is stil’d.

“ She bears the crown in merry England,
The crown and queenly dignity ;
Her daughter dear has stolen been,
For thus the tale was told to me.

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“ Her daughter dear has stolen been,
She lieth now in strict durance ;
To blessed Kirk she may not go,
And far, far less to merry dance.

“ She ne’er may out of the window look
Except to watch her women stand ;
Nor play at tables with the King
Unless the Queen is close at hand.

“ Except the King, so aged and grey,
No earthly man she e’er has seen ;
Each night her chamber door is locked,
And she who locks it is the Queen.

“ The Damsel’s named proud Ermeline,
She sits in Upsal sorrowing sore ;
Whilst bolts of steel and iron bars
Make fast the Damsel’s chamber door.

“ The King he has a sister’s son,
And Allevod is the name he bears ;
And he’s to wed the lovely maid
As soon as he the Kingdom heirs.

“ But I will give thee saddle and horse,
And golden spurs I will supply ;
Thou ne’er shalt ride a path so wild
But thou shalt reach a hostelry.

“ And I will garments give to thee,
With gold adorned at the seam ;
And I will give thee a ruddy shield,
Wherein the richest diamonds gleam.

“ And I will give thee a silken band,
With roses ’tis embroider’d all ;
Whilst thou dost bear that girdle fair
No word thou say’st shall vainly fall.”

Forth stepped the Daughter of the Dwarf,
For, ah ! she loved the knight so dear :

“ And I will give thee a faulchion good,
And I will give thee a polished spear.

“ Thou ne’er shalt ride through wood so wide
But thou shalt surely find the way ;
And ne’er, Sir Knight, engage in fight
But victory thou shalt bear away.

“Thou never, never shalt sail the sea
But in safety thou shalt come to land ;
Thou never, never shalt wounded be,
I ween, by any human hand.”

It was the proud Dame Thorelile,
The clear wine into the cup she pour'd :
“Now haste thee from the elfin hill,
Ere home arrive the elfin Lord.”

Sir Thunye rides in the good green wood,
His spear it gleams so wide, so wide ;
And soon he meets the Dwarf himself,
To his mountain home as the Dwarf would
ride.

“Well met, well met, Sir Thunye the Knight,
Thy horse he speeds right gallantly ;
Say whither, whither dost thou ride ?
On journey bound thou seemst to be.”

“Riding to woo, Sir Dwarf, I am,
Riding to wed a beauteous lady ;
To break a spear I do not fear,
For weal or woe alike I'm ready.”

“ Ride on thy way, Sir Thunye the Knight,
Nought else than peace thou shalt have from me ;
In Upsal town a swain there lives
Will willingly break a lance with thee.”

Sir Thunye rides in Sweden's land,
Essay his fortune there would he ;
And there he found nine stalwart knights,
Stood armed beneath the forest tree.

Upon their heads their helms were placed,
Their good shields glittered before their
breasts ;

By their sides hung down their gilded swords,
And their spears hung ready within the rests.

“ Halloo, ye Swedish champions nine !
Say, will ye fight for honour now ?
Or will ye fight for ruddy gold,
Or the ladies' love for whom ye glow ? ”

Then answered Allevod, the King's son,
High rose the pride his heart within :

“ Enough I have of honour and gold,
No more of either need I win.”

“ There sits a maid in Upsal town,
That maid is named proud Ermeline ;
By lance we'll settle whose shall be
That lovely maiden, mine or thine.”

The first course that together they rode
So furious were that knightly twain
Asunder burst their shields of gold,
And their broken spears flew o'er the plain.

But now the second course they ride,
And again they meet with a crash like
thunder ;

Sir Allevod fell from his gilded selle,
His sturdy neck-bone burst asunder.

That vexed sore the Swedish knights,
Their leader's fall they fain would wrake ;
But fortune proved so stern and dour,
The good knight's faulchion drove them back.

It was then the Swedish knights
Their ruffled garb adjusted they ;
And unto the hall, the regal hall,
To the Swedish King they took their way.

“ A Jutt is come to our land, Sir King,
Armed and dight in elfin way ;
Of eight good knights the limbs he's broke,
Who strove with him in battle fray.

“ Of eight good knights the limbs he broke,
Halt and lame they will aye remain ;
And upon the sod lies Allevod,
Thy sister's son by that Jotun slain.”

Then answer made the ancient King,
Rending his hair so long and grey :
“ With sable and mard I'll them reward
Who dare this cursed Jutt to slay.”

Forth rode the Swedish courtiers then,
To slay the Jutt so sure they made ;
But soon from them the vaunt he drove,
Such heavy blows on their polls he laid.

No sable and mard was their reward,
When they returned from the battle fray ;
They must doff, I ween, their armour sheen,
And clothe them in the wadmál grey.

That vexed the Swedish courtiers sore,
And in mournful guise they murmured out :
“ In Sweden’s land lives none can stand
Against this wild and sturdy Jutt.”

Sir Thunye he to Upsal rides,
Respect and honour attend his path ;
The Swedish knights they held their peace,
And were only glad to escape his wrath.

And he has broken the huge steel-bar,
And he the savage bears has slain ;
And out he has led the lovely maid
Who long in dreary thrall had lain.

“ Now welcome be, Sir Thunye the Knight,
Unto this savage Swedish clime ;
I say to thee in verity
I’ve sighed for thee a weary time.

“ When I was but a little child,
To me ’twas spæd that a knight should come
From foreign land, should Allevod slay,
And to England’s realm should bear me home.

“ I beg of thee, Sir Thunye the Knight,
That thou as a Knight by me wilt stand ;
There liveth none beneath the sun,
To whom I’d sooner yield my hand.”

Then answered amain Sir Thunye the Knight,
As he bowed his knee to the Lady fair ;
“ With heart and hand by thee to stand,
By the holy name of Christ I swear.”

And so he took the lovely maid,
With her store of gold so ruddy of hue ;
And to Denmark’s land he her conveyed,
Where a loving pair full soon they grew.

He has carried her to his castle hall,
Like a blooming flower there she shone ;
Rejoicéd all, both great and small,
In Alsey’s ancient town that wone.

It was bold Sir Thunye the Knight,
His knightly faith so well kept he ;
The next, next Monday morn he held
His bridal’s high festivity.

'Twas noised about in merry England
The King's lost daughter was found at last ;
Rejoiced, I ween, the King and Queen,
And away for ever their grief they cast.

The King a scroll to Sir Thunye sent,
Wishing him luck with his Ermeline ;
And begged he'd come across the foam
That he to him might the crown resign.

It was good Sir Thunye the Knight,
He spread on the yard his sails so wide ;
And they arrived in the far England
In less, I'm told, than two months' tide.

It was good Sir Thunye the Knight,
He steered his vessel towards the strand ;
And, lo ! the ancient King and Queen
Were walking on the yellow sand.

" Now welcome be Sir Thunye the Knight,
Thrice welcome be to this foreign strand ;
Of England all the fair kingdom shall
Be subject to thy knightly hand."

So he the kingdom has resigned,
And he has crowned the knight of fame ;
And dales and downs and England's towns
Thus subject to the knight became.

Now has Sir Thunye all achieved,
And now to joy may his heart resign ;
He rules by day old England gay,
And sleeps at night with his Ermeline.

A King more powerful there is none
Than he, the flower of chivalry ;
The knights, they say, of Sweden pray
He never more their guest may be.

THE CUCKOO'S SONG IN MERION.

From the Welsh of Lewis Morris.

THOUGH it has been my fate to see
Of gallant countries many a one ;
Good ale, and those that drank it free,
And wine in streams that seemed to run ;
The best of beer, the best of cheer,
Allotted are to Merion.

The swarthy ox will drag his chain,
At man's commandment that is done ;
His furrow break through earth with pain,
Up hill and hillock toiling on ;
Yet with more skill draw hearts at will
The maids of county Merion.

Merry the life, it must be owned,
Upon the hills of Merion ;
Though chill and drear the prospect round,
Delight and joy are not unknown ;
O who would e'er expect to hear
'Mid mountain bogs the cuckoo's tone ?

O who display a mien full fair,
A wonder each to look upon ?
And who in every household care
Defy compare below the sun ?
And who make mad each sprightly lad ?
The maids of county Merion.

O fair the salmon in the flood,
That over golden sands doth run ;
And fair the thrush in his abode,
That spreads his wings in gladsome fun ;
More beauteous look, if truth be spoke,
The maids of county Merion.

Dear to the little birdies wild
Their freedom in the forest lone ;
Dear to the little sucking child
The nurse's breast it hangs upon ;
Though long I wait, I ne'er can state
How dear to me is Merion.

Sweet in the house the Telyn's¹ strings
In love and joy where kindred wone ;
While each in turn a stanza sings,
No sordid themes e'er touched upon ;
Full sweet in sound the hearth around
The maidens' song of Merion.

And though my body here it be
Travelling the countries up and down ;
Tasting delights of land and sea,
True pleasure seems my heart to shun ;
Alas ! there's need home, home to speed—
My soul it is in Merion.

* The Harp.

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